

PLANNING COMMISSION

PRELIMINARY MINUTES

March 16, 2021

**6:00 PM
Zoom Meeting**

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MEMBERS PRESENT:

Alan Couch, Chairman
Terry Carter

Ryan Silvestri
Ted Stryhas

Phoebe Tucker

STAFF PRESENT:

Scott Murphy

Rose Goings

OTHERS PRESENT:

Eric Alden
Tim Banker
Sharon Bixby
Kathy Burns
Troy Caruso
Eliza Greene

Sharon Huntley
Justin Hyjek
Fred Marin
Sal Marottoli
Logan Nicoll

Kimberly Southworth
Kevin Theissen
Jason Rasmussen
Rachel Scudder
Eric Chattergee –OV-TV

I. CALL TO ORDER – ELECTRONIC MEETING GUIDELINES

1. Alan Couch called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He advised that the Electronic Meeting Guidelines, consistent with Vermont Act 92 (H681) Sections 5 and 6 signed by Governor Scott on March 30, 2021. He asked all persons to remain muted until they are recognized to comment. He asked everyone to “raise their ZOOM hands” and he will recognize them in the order in which their hands were raised. He advised that this hearing is to discuss and receive comments for the Village Center Revitalization.

II. ROLL CALL

1. Alan Couch did a roll call of the board
Terry Carter – present
Ryan Silvestri – present
Ted Stryhas – present

- Phoebe Tucker – present
Alan Couch said he is present
2. All members are present.

III. **CONSIDERATION OF ANY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR REMOVALS TO THE AGENDA**

1. None were needed.

IV. **APPROVE MINUTES**

1. Alan Couch advised that the minutes to be approved are from the meeting of February 16, 2021.
2. Terry Carter clarified that on page 3, Item 6I, she is not certain that the Farmers' Market will start on Memorial Day weekend, but it does occur on Fridays starting in the late spring from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
3. **MOTION by Ryan Silvestri and seconded by Terry Carter to approve the minutes February 16, 2021 with change noted. Motion passed unanimously.**

V. **COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS**

1. There were none.

VI. **PUBLIC MEETING – REVITALIZE THE VILLAGE OF LUDLOW – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

1. Alan Couch referred to the agenda and noted that, while there may be questions regarding the pending Divided Sky Drug Rehabilitation project, he said that it is not on tonight's agenda and will be in front of the DRB. It will not be discussed this evening.
2. Alan Couch said that the Town/Village received a grant for revitalization of the Village Center. He said that during the pandemic, some of the zoning regulations were relaxed to allow for more outdoor dining and take out windows. He said that the zoning regulations are dynamic and changing. He said that the town plan encourages responsible, economically feasible and reasonable growth. The Planning Commission is trying to be proactive and to develop a responsible plan for the downtown. He welcomed Jason Rasmussen and Rebecca Scudder from the Mount Ascutney Regional Planning Commission who will be working with us to develop this plan. He added that they started work on the plan in January 2021 and the grant work must be completed by May 2022.
3. Jason Rasmussen said that they are working on a Master Plan for the Village and want to be reactive. They want to compile a list of suggestions and will boil it down to a list of tangible, doable projects. They will also be looking at the zoning regulations. (He showed a map of the designated Village Center, noting that it runs along Main Street, parts of Pleasant and High Streets, Elm Street, Kesman Park, Veterans' Park and Elm Street Park. Copy of map is attached) He showed a slide of the project overview:

PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Develop a master plan for Ludlow Village Center

- Looking toward Village Revitalization
 - Pandemic economic recovery efforts
 - Identify and prioritize physical improvements
 - including streetscapes, outside dining, sidewalks and parking
 - Prepare land use bylaw amendments
 - including streamlining the permit process
 - ensuring dimensional and density standards
 - relaxing parking requirements
 - making emergency COVID adjustments to zoning permanent
 - Looking at incentives for long term rentals
 - Develop and implementation plan
 - Project must be completed by May 31, 2022
4. Jason Rasmussen then went over the slide for the Town of Ludlow 2018 Municipal Plan Goals, highlighting specific portions (seen here in *italics*)
- GOALS FROM THE 2018 MUNICIPAL PLAN
- We are focused on revitalizing the Village center which *involves enhancing the streetscapes, making it a pleasant and safe place to walk, investing in existing buildings, filling empty storefronts, slowing traffic down*
 - Additional streetscape enhancements within the Village are designed, *which include sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, pedestrian lighting, landscaping and the provision of street furniture*
 - Ludlow wishes to foster conditions that support *vibrant local stores and community services...*
 - *Adaptive reuse of historic buildings*
5. Jason Rasmussen noted that Photoshop images of building lighting and possible small changes that could be made.
6. Rose Goings said that the photos were submitted by Sal Marottoli. She said that other photos included gooseneck lighting, renovated canopies at gas stations, parklet and a fire pit at Outer Limits in Proctorsville.
7. Phoebe Tucker said that she would like to see more art and murals. She said that we could collaborate with local artists and students. She suggested painting a mural on the side of the Brewfest building.
8. Alan Couch said he agreed that would be nice, but it is up to the building owners.
9. Eric Alden said that he thinks that the scope of the map is too large. They should shrink it to the business district on Main Street. He said that in Boston they have parklets and people love them. He thinks they should replace the streetlights with ones like the ones in front of the Mill, improve facades and put up historic plaques.
10. Rose Goings said that she sent photos of benches in front of stores in Saratoga Springs. She thinks that the parklets are a good idea and would provide outside seating for restaurants. She said that if they relax the parking regulations for the Village Center (they haven't been changed in many years), it could help clear the sidewalks for wheelchair accessibility,
11. Sal Marottoli said that if there is any way that he can support this, he would like to. He said that an immediate benefit would be back-lit signs and improved canopies at the gas stations.
12. Logan Nicoll said that the Legislature is thinking about redesigning the Village Center program and it will drastically change it. They may expand it to include surrounding neighborhoods. You may want to make sure that the people in town have a stake in this. He said that the picnic tables are a great idea. He said they should be prepared to market to the town and have people invest in this.

13. Alan Couch said we expanded the Village Center to allow property owners access to tax credits and incentives for long term housing.
14. Justin Hyjek asked how much was this grant for.
15. Alan Couch said about \$18,000 and it is to cover the expense of having Jason Rasmussen and Rachel Scudder work with us.
16. Jason Rasmussen said that we don't have the funds needed to make the changes, but we will try to figure out ways to get the funding to get these things done. He will try to connect the town with grant programs.
17. Justin Hyjek said he would like updated signs.
18. Eliza Greene said the lights the Photoshop pictures with the lights on the buildings. She asked if there is any law prohibiting lights going over Main Street at the entrance and exit from the town.
19. Alan Couch said that he would like to find a way to bury the wires and get rid of the poles. It would provide a better view of the mountain. He said it takes money, but they could work through the budget or the highway department. We should start saving for a 10 year implementation. We need to clean up the sidewalks and spruce up the village.
20. Kathy Burns said that 10 years ago, she spoke with Howard Barton about burying the wires. She said that the wires that actually run across Main Street are not the electrical wires, but telephone and cable. That should be addressed. She said that the electrical wires run parallel down Main Street. She said that, at that time, the cost to bury the electrical wires was about \$2,000,000.00. She agrees that the gas stations' lights should be changed and they should do away with neon lights. She suggested that they look into Epic grants.
21. Alan Couch said that every time a portion of a street gets dug up, they should replace that small portion of the wires with underground wires.
22. Kathy Burns said that the electrical lines can run through the back of the businesses, but that would be a huge expense.
23. Rose Goings said that they have discussed changing sign regulations, but that the people need to come to the Planning Commission meetings when the Planning Commission discusses signs. We need diversity at the meetings. She said that some people do like internally lit signs, while others don't. We need good sign regulations or ordinances. We need a comprehensive sign ordinance for businesses and possibly a different one to other areas. She said it would be great to expand the designation down to Pond Street for tax credits. She said that there are empty apartments above some of the businesses and she would like to see them used for affordable or work force housing. She said that signs are a big issue.
24. Alan Couch said that we do have sign ordinances now.
25. Eliza Greene said we need parks and Dorsey Park would be a great place for locals to use. She would like to see a pavilion and grills.
26. Tim Banker said that he would like to see multi-use walking, green space trails.
27. Jason Rasmussen said there may be permitting issues with trails close to the river. We should look into greenways.
28. Phoebe Tucker said she would like to see free libraries throughout the village.
29. Alan Couch asked if she meant like the bulletin board at the Berkshire Bank, with take a book, leave a book.
30. Phoebe Tucker said yes, maybe by the library and along Main Street.
31. Justin Hyjek asked how many parks there are in the Village.
32. Jason Rasmussen said Veterans', Elm, Kesman and Dorsey.
33. Justin Hyjek said it is great to energize the village. He would like to see more benches to attract visitors.

34. Alan Couch said before COVID, we have concerts at the gazebo in Veterans' Park, the Chili Cook-off at Kesman Park and high school sports at Dorsey Park. We need to push the town and village to get this on their agendas and budgets. We need to implement some of these ideas and start saving to do it.
35. Rose Goings asked business owners how they feel about relaxed parking requirements or even, maybe none and allow businesses to find their own parking.
36. Eliza Greene said she loves it.
37. Alan Couch said he likes the parklets, but they would be close to the traffic. He suggested lowering the speed limit. He said that people can park at the municipal parking lot or around the corner. We need to extend outside dining safely.
38. Rose Goings said that this summer, they put 2 small, cute tables outside of DJs. She said that current parking regulations call for 2 parking spaces per dwelling unit, but that doesn't make sense. Also for small, 200-300 square feet retail stores, we could take away the parking requirement. We need to think about other areas for parking. She said that some businesses have agreements with other businesses to use their parking if they have different business hours. There is also back parking that could be used.
39. Justin Hyjek said that he is worried about parklet seating with traffic and especially tractor trailer trucks. He asked about speed bumps to slow traffic.
40. Jason Rasmussen said there have been issues with slowing traffic due to the nature of Route 103.
41. Eric Alden said that there have not been any issues with parklets in Boston. He added that in some ways, the parklets act as traffic calmer, with cars slowing down when they see them.
42. Jason Rasmussen said that the state does have guidelines and he will look into them: how they are allowed, where and safety precautions.
43. Kathy Burns noted that Brandon did revitalization efforts to their town and asked where they may have gotten the funds.
44. Jason Rasmussen said he would also look into that.
45. Ryan Silvestri asked if there would be an issue adding signs like NO JAKE BRAKES, DENSE AREA and PEDESTRIANS. Signs that would make it very clear that cars are entering a pedestrian village.
46. Alan Couch said that is a great idea. We should look into putting up signs at either end of the village. He said we should also look into lowering the speed limit in the village. He said that the state trucks lift their plows when they enter the village and stop sanding.
47. Ryan Silvestri asked what would stop us from putting up signs – extra emphatic signs.
48. Alan Couch said they should take this to Scott Murphy and Ron Tarbell to put up signs where the state highway ends.
49. Jason Rasmussen said there are certain ordinances regarding jake brakes at the federal level. He will look into it.
50. Scott Murphy said they can look into the zoning amendments and possibly easing the permit procedure. There have been many discussions regarding lowering the speed limit in the village along Main Street. He gave an update on the following items
 - They are working on an mountain bike path behind the Elementary School.
 - They are working on free Wi-Fi hot spots near the library and high school building
 - They received a Better Places grant for picnic tables and will be working with the art students from Fletcher Farm and the Independent School
 - They are working on trash receptacles for Kesman, Veterans', Elm and Dorsey parks.
 - They will be planting trees in Veterans' and Kesman parks.
 - Vail Bridge (intersection Route 103 and VT Route 100S) will be replaced during the construction season of 2022. They road will be closed for no more than 21 days and they will be setting up detours.

- He will check with Logan Nicoll regarding tax credits.
51. Phoebe Tucker suggested installing charging stations for electric vehicles in the village.
 52. Alan Couch said this has been discussed before and finding a location is tricky. The best locations are on private property (including the Municipal Parking lot.) They will investigate this.
 53. Eliza Greene advised that Main and Mountain has signed a contract to have an electric vehicle charging station put on their property. They will share this with the public.
 54. Alan Couch said the board appreciates the input tonight. He said that some of the suggestions are beyond the scope of what we can and are able to do. He thanked Jason Rasmussen and Rachel Scudder.
 55. Jason Rasmussen said there were lots of ideas and he will sift through them to determine what will work, what won't work and what is cost feasible. He asked anyone with ideas or comments to send them to his email address which he put in the chat area.
 56. Alan Couch said this is a dynamic process and we received some good ideas. He hopes that people will continue to participate.
 57. Troy Caruso asked if the town could purchase the municipal lot or buy property on Main Street to make into a parking lot.
 58. Rose Goings said that they have a year-to-year lease on the municipal lot and as long as the current owner owns the property, we will continue. He may sell the property and we could lose the lease. She added that the property is in the flood area and not buildable land. She said that he would have to speak to Scott Murphy about the town purchasing other property to make more parking.
 59. Troy Caruso asked if the town could buy property and knock down a building to make more parking. He said the further people have to walk, the less likely they are to come into town.
 60. Alan Couch said he would guess that funds are not available to do that.
 61. Rose Goings said she would not like to see us tear down a building when we need housing.
 62. Alan Couch said that question cannot be answered at this time.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Broad Band Discussion
 - i. Terry Carter referred to an email that she had sent the board and asked if they would put broad band on the agenda for the next meeting. She said we need to plan for a project when funds become available.
 - ii. Rachel Scudder said that she is available to come to the meeting next month to discuss this. She will ask the representative from EC Fiber to attend also.
 - iii. Terry Carter said that there has been some talk about Elon Musk being in contract with the state about satellite coverage.
 - iv. Logan Nicoll said that there is a big bill in the legislature regarding broad band coverage. He said that the State is in favor of CUDs (Communications Union District) and the state is broken up into a number of them already. There aren't any in the towns right next to Ludlow. He said we need to try to join an existing CUD. He said that Cavendish was having problems with COMCAST a few years ago. He said that the CUD is the easiest way to expand broad band.
2. Next Meeting
 - i. Alan Couch said that the next regular meeting will be on April 19th at 6:00 p.m. and they will include broad band on the agenda.

VIII. **ADJOURN**

1. **MOTION by Ryan Silvestri and seconded by Terry Carter to adjourn this meeting.
Motion passed unanimously.**
2. Meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisha Klaiber

Alan Couch, Chairman

Ted Stryhas

Terry Carter

Phoebe Tucker

Ryan Silvestri

